

## Pomegranate Seeds and a Flower Crown by Luddleston

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**Summary:**

*“‘Need’ is different from ‘want’,” Zagreus pointed out. “You can still desire things that aren’t completely necessary, even as a shade, I expect.”*

Patroclus steadily gets to know his stranger a little better.

Prequel to [Our Beloved Stranger](#)

## Pomegranate Seeds and a Flower Crown

### Author's Note:

I couldn't stop thinking about Pat/Zag after writing that last one so TA-DAAAAA

Patroclus is insanely fun to write.

His stranger (and whenever did he come to think of him as *his* stranger, anyway?) was more brutally wounded than usual this time. That, Patroclus noticed immediately upon his arrival. Rather than leaving a trail of burned grass quickly sprouting back to life behind him, Zagreus left a trail of bright red. And also burned grass.

He'd always been curious about the red. They said gods didn't bleed the way mortals did, but Patroclus hadn't seen a god injured, Zagreus aside. He wondered if Zagreus was an exception, and if so, why? It felt awfully rude to ask somebody about the color of his blood, so Patroclus kept his wonderings to himself.

"Am I ever glad to see you, sir," Zagreus said, his breathing ragged and his footsteps unsteady. He wasn't limping as much as he should have been, given the deep cut in his thigh which made Patroclus want to wince in sympathy just looking at it. "Asterius got me," he said, by way of explanation.

"Well, then, come here," Patroclus gestured for him to sit—he certainly wasn't going to get up. "Let me take a look at it."

"Oh?" Zagreus took a seat beside him, shifting to allow Patroclus to examine the wound, which was still bleeding. An ordinary man would have perished or at least gone unconscious from the loss of blood by now, but Zagreus was as alert as ever, if a little labored in his breathing. The wound was deep but clean, a long slash. Clearly he had been struck by the minotaur's axe, not gored by his horns.

"Hm. If I had the supplies, I would suture this for you, but... shall I bandage it instead?" Patroclus applied a bit of pressure to the wound, to at least stop the bleeding. Zagreus winced, but his youthful features smoothed out shortly after. Either his tolerance for pain was impressive or his ability to feel hurt was dampened.

"Suture?"

"Stitch it closed." Patroclus shook his head. "I suppose you usually just die."

"I do," Zagreus laughed. "I might last a bit longer if you bandage it, yes. Although if I die this time, I'll come back right away."

"Will you?" Patroclus reached around for his hoard of various curiosities—there were certainly some bandages there, or something that would serve. Zagreus' blood did not stain his hands, slipping from his fingers into the grass. He wasn't certain if it had to do with the quality of the god's blood or Patroclus' own shade form, but he appreciated that it didn't stay on his palms like the blood of human men who had died before him.

"Yes, it's, ah... it's a favor from Than. I call it 'death defiance'." His face was a little red now, and Patroclus could not help smiling and giving a rueful shake of his head. His stranger was even more strange than previously assumed. To be so twitterpated over Death.

Patroclus got the feeling Zagreus was watching his face as he tended to him, but he went about it in the same way he'd treat anybody. Although, perhaps with a little more gentleness, if only because Zagreus did not get much of that around here.

Zagreus jumped when Patroclus had to loop the bandage around his inner thigh. The wound was rather high up. "You really aren't used to this," he observed, mostly because he'd guessed it would make Zagreus squirm. He wasn't wrong.

"Well. You seem to be quite well-practiced, so that's good," Zagreus said.

"Ten years of war do not only make one practiced in taking men apart, but also in putting them back together." He tied off the end of the bandage, the cloth coloring instantly but not becoming entirely soaked with blood. "I think you'll live. Well. You won't, but you know how it is."

Zagreus laughed brightly, the kind of noise that made the slow tumble of the Lethe past his glade sound jubilant rather than tearful. "Yes, well, maybe I'll get to wipe that smug look off Theseus' face before I die." He set his hand on Patroclus' shoulder, his touch less a friendly pat and more a caress. Hm. "Thank you, sir."

"Anything I can do to help," he said, the flatness in his tone making it into a joke on how he had very little he could do to help. Zagreus smiled again. He still had not let go.

"I'll see you next time," he said, although he had no way of predicting that.

"Whatever you say, stranger."

Patroclus swore, despite his being quite dead, that he could feel his heart beat. Just for a second. The sound of the great golden doors wrenching open and then shut dragged him from whatever reverie that was, so that he might return to the usual reverie instead.

The usual reverie, however, was harder to sink into, considering.

The loss of Achilles was a wound Patroclus lived with. It would never heal, the pain of it would never lessen as long as he chose to keep the memory of Achilles with him (forever, if his fortitude held out).

But that did not make him immune to the charms of strange, lovely godlings who trailed red and smoke through his chambers.

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The next time Patroclus' stranger came around (and he wasn't certain if this was the next time for Zagreus, or if he'd attempted to leave the Underworld four more times between) he was uninjured, practically bounding over to

Patroclus like an excited puppy. It was rather endearing. Patroclus missed his dogs for a moment.

Zagreus was grinning, brilliant, the dimples in his cheeks standing out. Patroclus, bitter as he was, couldn't deny how sweet it was on him.

"Hm. What's got you looking like... that?" he asked, gesturing in the general direction of Zagreus' face.

"What? Do I look some particular way?" Zagreus asked, taking a seat next to him. He let out a sigh as he relaxed into the grass, digging his toes in, which made it smolder to the roots. "I suppose I must. I'm not supposed to tell anyone, though."

"Who am I going to spread rumors to?" Patroclus asked, gesturing around at the empty glade. "I must know." *What makes you smile that way? How can one make it happen again?*

"You've convinced me," said Zagreus, who was clearly looking to be convinced. He leaned in close, steadying himself on Patroclus' shoulder so that he could speak directly into his ear, as if some of the fish in the river were particularly gossipy. "My mother came back. To the House. Can you believe it?" He was already moving away by the end of his sentence, but Patroclus' cheeks were warm from Zagreus' breath and his own internal heat, which apparently he was capable of generating still.

He became very glad his dark skin did not show a flush. "Queen Persephone?" Patroclus asked, also in a hush, because it felt only appropriate.

Zagreus nodded, his grin spreading even wider. "I mean, we can't tell anyone, because if Olympus finds out, then. Well. They'll be in a state if they learn she's been on the surface this whole time, I mean, they don't even know I'm her son." This seemed to do little to dampen Zagreus' enthusiasm. "But I'm glad she's back. It's so good having her around."

Patroclus knew little of the queen, but he did leave his glade from time to time back when he still thought Achilles may have been alive in the mortal

world and would be at his side eventually. She was rumored to be a kind soul, with a caring heart that her son had clearly inherited. He thought of his own mother, who had not seen him since he was but a boy. Perhaps she, too, had a spot to herself as he had his unchanging Elysian glade.

Zagreus had plucked one of the tiny white flowers from the field, and was twisting it between his fingers. Well. Perhaps his glade changed from time to time.

It was a fanciful notion, the idea that Zagreus' green eye was especially verdant now that the parent he'd inherited it from (Patroclus assumed) was near. "I'm glad for you," he said, managing a little smile.

"I couldn't have gotten up there without your help," Zagreus said, although Patroclus was fairly certain divine intervention made up for the majority of Zagreus' success. He certainly did not deserve Zagreus' heartfelt, "*thank you, sir,*" nor the embrace Zagreus pulled him into, almost crushingly tight.

Patroclus returned the touch before fully comprehending what he was doing, settling his hands on Zagreus' lower back. He was as warm as if he'd lain out in the sun for an hour, smelled of burned grass and fresh soil, as if he were made from the earth they all lived beneath. His cheek against Patroclus' was something like a revelation. Of what, Patroclus wasn't quite sure.

Zagreus was still smiling as he left, ebullient and beautiful, the heat of him clinging to Patroclus' palms after the door slid shut.

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Zagreus managed to learn that Patroclus missed his dogs, somehow (mind reading felt unlikely, so it was probably Achilles) and was determined to tell him stories about Cerberus this time, his hands busied as he spoke with his reward from his previous chamber.

"So then, I suppose, he's gotten too overfed to actually want to eat all of the treats I provide him with. Which meant he brought one of those rotten satyr sacks into the middle of the great hall. Eugh."

Patroclus had never seen his stranger in a fight, but he certainly destroyed a pomegranate with speed, running a short knife Patroclus had never seen him use around the top of it and then in several stripes down the side, moving quickly as he spoke.

"It was a nightmare to clean. Poor Dusa." He cracked the fruit open, revealing vibrant red insides, and caught several of the seeds in his palm, tipping his head back to toss them in his mouth. He was silent for a moment as he chewed, hands already working to loosen more of the fruit from its thick peel. "Anyway, I told him that if he did that again, I wasn't bringing him any more treats."

"I suspect he would get more treats anyway," Patroclus said, already privy to the details of the way Zagreus bribed his way past the Hound of Hades.

Zagreus laughed. "Yes, I'd still give him treats. How could you not? He's the best boy." Juice stained his fingers from delicate fruit that was accidentally crushed as he pulled it free. A trail of it ran down his forefinger to the web connecting to his thumb, and he licked after it as he took another bite, his tongue pink against the vibrant red.

After his first few bites, Zagreus slowed his voracious pace, bringing the seeds to his mouth a few at a time, pinched between his fingertips instead of flat on his palm. He licked his fingers after almost every bite, curling his tongue to get every last drop of juice.

Patroclus had seen Zagreus bring food into his chamber before, usually strange fried snacks acquired at Charon's shop or else lying around some random chamber of the Underworld (he hoped gods could not be made ill by food that had gone off). Once, Zagreus had eaten an entire onion raw, which was one of the more horrifying experiences of Patroclus' afterlife.

This was something else entirely.

Zagreus was reclining beside him as he normally did not allow himself to do, always on his feet, always moving. Every motion of his hands felt purposeful, if that purpose was to make Patroclus look at his mouth. His lips were soon as stained as his fingertips, color pooling into the creases of

his lower lip as if he had been drinking a dark red wine. The attitude of indulgence made him look like the prince he was, or else like a temptation made for Patroclus specifically.

He wanted to lick the red from the curve of Zagreus' mouth.

Patroclus shifted where he sat, actually *fidgeting*, unaccustomed to this sort of desire as he was. Although he'd been attracted to others aside from Achilles, had shared their bed with them, he never thought that in death...

"Do you want some, sir?" Zagreus offered the half of the fruit that he hadn't touched yet. Patroclus imagined eating from his hand.

"No, I. I have no need for such things." Eating was another thing he hadn't done since he yet lived.

"'Need' is different from 'want,'" Zagreus pointed out. "You can still desire things that aren't completely necessary, even as a shade, I expect."

He took another bite, his tongue once more peeking between his lips to lick his fingertips clean. His mouth was so red. Eyes lowered, lashes shading his face, he could have been a painting. He was a god meant to be worshipped. Patroclus still wasn't particularly clear on what Zagreus was the god of, but he felt an urge to supplicate himself regardless.

Patroclus reached not for the fruit but for Zagreus, taking his face in one hand and tipping his chin up. There was a little noise of shock as Zagreus was pulled into the kiss, and oh, this may have been the wrong move entirely. Surely Zagreus would run, surely those doors would slam closed with a ring of finality that would leave no pleasant sweetness lingering on Patroclus' tongue.

He pulled away, ready to apologize, although whatever hung at the tip of his tongue was going to come out stammered and tangled up—

And Zagreus pulled him back in.

His hand slipped up to hold the back of Patroclus' neck, his chin tilted for a better angle, lips pressing against lips with less hesitation, more heat.

That same scent of earth clung to Zagreus' skin, the sharp taste of pomegranate on his lips and, when he opened his mouth and allowed Patroclus to take him as he might, his tongue. His temperature seemed to run higher than Patroclus', a gentle heat that made Patroclus want to press closer, to absorb his warmth.

Zagreus pulled away after only a moment of intensity, his eyes searching Patroclus'. For what?

"Are you sure... is this okay?"

Hesitation. He was looking for hesitation. And he would find none—Patroclus had plenty of time to hesitate and had done so on enough occasions that now, he could only act.

He lowered himself until he lay practically atop Zagreus to kiss him again, enjoying the frantic way Zagreus' hands skated over his shoulders and his back, trying to feel all of him at once. He was as eager as Patroclus could remember being in his own youth, although he was uncertain how old Zagreus was and exactly how time and maturity worked for the gods.

Patroclus' soul often bore more than one heavy weight, and yet the brightness of Zagreus' smile, the *life* in him, made that weight lighter. That life seeped into Patroclus with every kiss. Perhaps that was what Zagreus was the god of. Life. And perhaps he was sharing with Patroclus the most potent of his blessings, making a faded shade's heart pound and his breath quicken and his body ache for touch.

He wanted Zagreus with a fervor he had all but forgotten.

Patroclus reversed their position, resting on his back with his cloak pooling out beneath him, Zagreus atop him. He hooked a hand around Zagreus' knee, pulling Zagreus astride his lap, and raised his head as Zagreus leaned in. The familiar motions made the present mix with the past, and he

expected, for just a moment and in a very far-away part of himself, to see blond curls hanging about his head as his lover gave him another kiss.

Zagreus groaned when Patroclus slung an arm around his waist and weighed him down, ridding them of the few inches of space between Zagreus' crotch and Patroclus' waist. If only Patroclus did not wear armor.

There had been no words exchanged aside from Zagreus' soft concern for him, so Patroclus was left almost entirely unsure what Zagreus wanted. Right now, Zagreus mostly wanted to kiss him without stopping, languid and messy, his hand stroking Patroclus' neck, his jaw. He was responsive enough that Patroclus could read his desire in his reactions, in the way he moaned when Patroclus squeezed his thigh, the way he rolled his hips when Patroclus bit at his lower lip.

Patroclus wanted all of him. The need (and it was a *need*, now, for all their conversation about desire versus necessity) hit him like a physical blow, the kind that drives into your solar plexus and lays you out on your back, making you gasp for breath. Well. He certainly was flat on his back, at least. Flat on his back with the lithe, beautiful shape of his stranger, of his *prince* above him, sighing in pleasure as Patroclus seized him around the waist.

Patroclus had not given much thought to sex in the afterlife. He'd had no reason to. He had reason now, and said reason was moaning his name as Patroclus kissed his jaw, his neck.

"You know," Zagreus said, his voice full of tremor, "I've never kissed a man with a beard before."

Not that he'd never kissed a man before. Patroclus wondered if it had been Achilles, if he'd given Zagreus that sharp, over-sure grin of his before. *I know this will feel incredible*, that look had always said. Or perhaps Zagreus had finally stopped hesitating in his advances on Death.

Probably, it was Achilles. Patroclus knew his lover's tastes, and a prime example of them was currently straddling him.

"Do you mind it?" Patroclus asked. "Some people find it irritating."

“No, I’m...” and here, Zagreus paused, gasping and tangling his fingers in Patroclus’ hair, because Patroclus had gone back to kissing him as soon as Zagreus pronounced himself unbothered, “I’m not very sensitive to that kind of thing.”

“Hm.” His skin was still getting red, though. Perhaps it simply wasn’t noticeable compared to all of the other injuries he incurred on any given day. “Well, I suppose I shall keep going, then.”

“Don’t just—“ Zagreus groaned, rocking against him again and making Patroclus curse his armor, that he could not feel the hard shape of Zagreus’ cock against him. “I want more.”

“Do you?” Patroclus lightened his touch, fingertips just barely skating over Zagreus’ back to the curve of his ass. It was easier to tease him. To enjoy the frustrated little noise in his throat rather than admitting how desperately Patroclus himself wanted more, too.

Zagreus clutched at his chest, his fingertips pressing into the grooves of his cuirass. “Yes. Anything. I... unless you don’t want to go any further, of course. In which case I’ll hope Asterius isn’t behind the door out of this place because I would rather him not see me when I’m quite—“ He was cut off once again by Patroclus’ actions, this time, sitting up to make it easier for Zagreus to support himself while Patroclus pushed a hand between them to feel what he had not been able to beyond the barrier of his armor. "Quite aroused, yes."

If only some of the men Patroclus had known in life had turned their attention to this god. Perhaps they would have known some tact, then, because Zagreus was turning out to be a surprisingly gracious lover. It was entirely different from how humans described romance with the divine. He was so sweet Patroclus’ chest ached.

“I want to,” he said, feeling at the shape of Zagreus’ cock in his leggings, just as hard as he’d been imagining. He found himself surprised by the words leaving his own mouth.

When was the last time he’d *wanted* anything?

Except, perhaps, the low-humming desire for the love of his life to return, but that was something he forced himself not to want, because if he did, he would find himself constantly disappointed.

“Oh, good,” Zagreus sighed. “Kiss me again, then, please.”

“Since you asked of me so nicely.”

Zagreus was positioned now so that when he writhed in Patroclus’ lap, he ground down against Patroclus’ cock, which Patroclus had honestly not considered the existence of from his point of death up ‘til now. Gods. Had it felt so good in life or was this new? Or, perhaps it was that he’d gone so long without. Now that he had a lover in his arms, the heat was building considerably and immediately.

Zagreus removed his cloak and grasped his shoulders, all while bestowing him with kiss after filthy kiss, grinding into his lap like he’d have Patroclus’ cock deep in him if there weren’t several layers of clothing between them. He only separated himself from Patroclus for a moment to rid himself of the entire top layer of his clothing, leaving him in his leggings, which were all too easy to tug down in the front.

It was lewd, the way his cock jutted out over the waistband, but removing the rest of his clothing would require him to move, which Zagreus seemed quite opposed to. The only thing he did was shift so that he was straddling one of Patroclus’ thighs instead of the whole of his lap. To what end, Patroclus had no clue, because Zagreus cried out in pleasure when Patroclus grasped his cock and gave him yet another hungry kiss, rocking into his touch.

Stamina was not something Patroclus recalled himself lacking in since he was a youth, and yet, he felt he might come just from the way Zagreus reacted to his touch. He’d stopped kissing Patroclus, and laid his head on Patroclus’ shoulder instead, which meant he was free to talk, although Patroclus was unsure whether Zagreus knew what he was saying.

“Oh, yes, like that—gods I wish you were inside me right now.” Perhaps he did know what he said, after all. Patroclus would not have expected a god to

be submissive, but Zagreus was nothing of what Patroclus had expected a god to be.

Patroclus liked this bit—touching someone, cataloguing their responses, learning what made them shiver and whether that shiver was a good thing. Zagreus was particularly responsive whenever Patroclus toyed with the head of his cock, but he turned irritated quickly if Patroclus took too long before returning to stroking him, little frustrated huffs of breath against his neck.

“May I?” Zagreus asked, resting a hand on Patroclus’ inner thigh, just over the band of white fabric wrapped about his leg. “Do you want me to touch you, sir?”

He shouldn’t have been surprised by such a question, but he was. And before his mind caught up, his mouth answered: “yes.”

Had he always been going without underclothes in the afterlife, or did his shape simply manifest that way to allow Zagreus easier access? Did it matter, when Zagreus’ hand wrapped around him and he could feel a shiver—the good kind—run through the body draped over his?

No, it absolutely did not matter.

“Gods, you’re thick.” Zagreus swallowed, and thrust into Patroclus’ hand like he couldn’t help himself. “Next time, I want this in me.”

Patroclus had not been considering a next time, had barely worked himself through his astonishment that this time was happening, and had no reply for Zagreus save for another, “yes.” He supposed it was accurate.

Zagreus was good with his hands, mimicking Patroclus’ touch as if guessing that this was how he preferred to be handled, and he was not wrong for a second. Despite having only had Zagreus’ hand on him for moments, the pressure building within him was steadily rising to its apex.

Sealing his lips over Zagreus’ as he came was the only way Patroclus could muffle whatever silly declaration of affection his unfocused mind wanted to

release.

Zagreus had no such qualms, and was still saying nonsense as he thrust into Patroclus' hand, moving faster than Patroclus was stroking him. He cried out as he came, loud enough that Patroclus was sure they could hear him at the stadium. He was certain Zagreus wouldn't be bothered.

The way Zagreus sank into his arms after was even more intimate than the way Zagreus had brought him off, a soft sigh and a little flutter of golden leaves from the laurel he always wore.

"I wish I could stay like this," Zagreus said, "but I don't think that would facilitate my escape attempts."

"You don't want to stay here." Patroclus looked at the spill of Zagreus' clothing beside them, the fabric hooked over one ear of his paudron. "I imagine it won't take long for me to return to being my usual self." Sour and moping, unmotivated to do much of anything except ramble to himself and stare off into the distance, never quite seeing.

"I don't mind your usual self, Patroclus." How rare, that he heard his own name. "I only wish..."

Patroclus didn't ask what.

Zagreus produced an answer anyway. "I wish you didn't have to be alone. Either of you."

Either of you.

"But we are not entirely alone," Patroclus said. "Either of us." *We have you,* he did not say, because Zagreus would understand him.

"I know. But it's different." He took Patroclus' hand, lifted it to kiss the inside of his wrist, then his palm. "I am glad to make you feel less alone, though."

Patroclus looked at the discarded peel of the pomegranate lying a short distance away. He still wondered whether Zagreus' seduction had been

purposeful. He suspected it hadn't begun that way, but perhaps had become so when Zagreus realized he had Patroclus' attention.

Zagreus shifted in Patroclus' lap, as if to stand, and then hesitated.

"Do not feel poorly about leaving me here," Patroclus said. "I am sure Theseus is becoming more irate by the minute as you make him wait for you."

"Ugh. That's going to be fun to deal with," Zagreus grumbled, finally rising off Patroclus' lap. "I suppose I shall have to."

Once dressed, Zagreus looked his usual self, little indication of their tryst about him. Patroclus' own appearance was neatened by whatever force of Elysium kept him looking constantly the same, and once the grass of the field did so as well, the pomegranate's peel vanished. Perhaps if Patroclus allowed his mind to wander, he could become convinced that this never happened. Zagreus, he knew, had spoken of next time, but Patroclus' mind had become twisted up in death—

As the sound of the door closing gave him pause, he noticed a smattering of golden leaves lingering on his cloak. He picked one off, rubbing it between his fingers.

Hm.

Next time, then.

#### **Author's Note:**

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